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TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED DURING THE  
NATIONAL ANIMAL ID PROGRAM LISTENING SESSION

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2004

FLORIDA CATTLEMENS ASSOCIATION  
800 SHAKERAG RD.  
KISSIMMEE, FLORIDA  
9:00 A.M.

IN ATTENDANCE:

BILL HAWKS, UNDER SECRETARY, MARKETING AND REGULATORY PROGRAMS

DR. VALERIE RAGAN, ASSISTANT DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR

MARK BERLIN, MODERATOR

(The meeting began at 9:03 a.m. and opening comments were made by Mr. Bill Hawks and Dr. Valerie Ragan.)

MR. BERLIN: At this time, our first speaker will be Frankie Hall.

MR. HALL: Sir, I'd like to yield my time to Mr. Rooks. He's got my presentation from Farm Bureau.

MR. ROOKS: Thank you. My name is Larry Rooks. I serve as a committee member of the Florida Farm Bureau Beef Advisory Committee. The Florida Farm Bureau is the largest agricultural organization in Florida with 152,000 member families. A large portion of our members are livestock producers. On behalf of those producers, I want to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the National Animal Identification System. The Florida Farm Bureau is involved with other key groups in developing a pilot project that we expect will become a workable system for producers.

We support a program that will begin as voluntary with pilot projects to identify and solve problems as we move livestock through the market and other collection points. We understand that ultimately mandatory participation by all producers will be necessary; however, it must be a system that is easy to understand and one that does not unduly burden producers.

I know that you have heard that confidentiality is the biggest concern to producers. Protecting information from those who would use it to harass, ridicule, or destroy our livelihood is paramount. Unless this information is

exempted from the Freedom of Information Act, producers will resist participation in the National ID System.

Producers should not be required to bear the burden of cost alone. Anytime you require mandatory participation in a program, costs should be shared by all parties, including the federal government. The cost of this system is expected to run into the millions of dollars, and, unfortunately, livestock producers cannot pass along this cost. Small producers would be the most likely to be affected by this system because they lack the facilities and equipment to tag and transfer the information to a database.

Florida has approximately 1.5 million head of all classes of livestock. Most of these producers own less than 60 head, so cost will be a major factor to the majority of Florida producers.

Another confusing aspect of the ID system to producers is what they're supposed to do. What is a producer's responsibility once an animal is tagged? Will they be required to maintain records on their farms or transfer it to a central database? Our understanding is that this system is designed to track animals--a disease within 48 hours of discovery. It is not the intent to be used for traceback on foodborne illnesses to the farm. Producers are concerned they could be held liable for foodborne illnesses that occur after the animals had left their possession and control. This point needs to be addressed during the initial stages.

The system must be designed with producers' profitability in mind. We understand that trade supports our economy and trade often dictates parameters within which countries must operate in order to sell their products on the international market. Animal disease and traceback capabilities of our producers are some of these parameters we must continue in today's world. We look forward to working with USDA in implementing the ID system. Thank you.

MR. BERLIN: Our next person is Joe Hilliard.

MR. HILLIARD: I'll pass.

MR. BERLIN: Okay. Bob Sand.

MR. SAND: Pass.

MR. BERLIN: Wade Grigsby.

DR. RAGAN: Where are your books?

MR. GRIGSBY: I can't read. (Laughter.) No, I just want to say, my brief experience working with the steering committee in animal surveillance has given me an opportunity to see how vast a task it is in animal surveillance. I personally do not see how there's any way to survey foreign and emerging diseases without knowing where it comes from. I think Randy Block coined the phrase, you can't measure--oh, I've lost it.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: You can't manage what you can't measure.

MR. GRIGSBY: You can't manage what you can't measure. Well, that goes to this very much so. So, we've seen what's happened with BSE, the single case of BSE that truly wasn't even ours, but we're still fighting almost a year later to try and open our markets with Japan and other foreign countries. So, with that idea and with that in perspective I think it's critical that we have some ID program in place so that we're able to track these diseases, eliminate the problem as quickly as possible, so that we can continue on in our industry with trade, which we've seen already is critical. So, with that, thank you.

MR. BERLIN: Thank you, Wade. The last speaker is Billy Kemper.

MR. KEMPER: I really didn't have any prepared comments. I had a few questions I would like to ask, and I didn't know when that would be appropriate.

MR. BERLIN: Just come up here.

DR. RAGAN: Ask away.

MR. KEMPER: First of all, as I told Joe Hilliard a while ago, I am very proud that we have people that are in charge of this program that have experience on the ground, somebody like you that's worked in Florida and realize what we had, and, you know, you've been on the ground with the cattle industry. I think it's a big plus.

Questions that I have, like when you load a load of calves on the truck, which a lot of producers in Florida don't go to livestock markets, sell direct, and, you know, we do have the calves individually ID'd, I guess with an electronic

system is what we'll end up going to. How will that affect--you know, I'm sure, like--and I hope I'm not telling something, but like those of us that work with our veterinarians on a regular basis and they're vaccinating our calves and such as that, you know, they know our cattle, know our herds, and our health papers, you know, lots of times we will say, "We've got ten loads of cattle to move," and they're not there to identify every load of cattle. They will give us the papers ahead of time.

Now, I assume when a truck leaves our ranch going to Texas or Kansas or wherever, every calf on that truck would have to be identified, scanned or something, in some form or fashion. Now, is that something that the ranch will be able to do, or is somebody, an extension person or veterinarian or somebody like that, is that person going to have to be there to actually seal that paper, put that on that health paper? It's just a logistic question.

And then another question is, on landowners with multiple counties, you know, will that--will that be all one premise, or, you know, Deseret, for example, has land in three counties, although, you know, they are contiguous except for the road between 'em. And if they do end up with more than one premise number, then do they have to do something official when they move cattle? I'm just picking on Deseret because of their size. But, like, when they move heifers from their heifer unit to their other units in the ranch, will that have to be recorded every time they do intra-ranch movements, I guess? Thank you.

MR. HAWKS: All right. That's--nobody else wants to make comments, ask questions?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Will we be able to? Will we be able to interact after---

MR. HAWKS: Actually, we can--we have not been--we have plenty of time. We can have somebody---

DR. RAGAN: What we'll do is, if we have any more comments, go ahead and make the comments, and then what we'll do is, we'll respond to the ones we have already heard. We want everybody to finish the comments first, and then we will go into that.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: I have one. One other question. When they designed the premise ID, did they use GPS numbers in that at all?

DR. RAGAN: What I'll do is, I'll address all those premise things together. That's a good question.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: I want to ask about show cattle. When--and not necessarily just cattle. When these animals have to be moved into different states in order to go to different shows, how will that affect that?

CHARLES: I assume that this premise ID, if I've got three separate pastures, I'd have to have three numbers, and that number is incorporated in this identification tag? The premise number?

DR. RAGAN: Nope.

CHARLES: It isn't?

DR. RAGAN: No, not in the tag itself. What I'll do is, I'll start there, because I've got a whole lot of premises questions, and then I think we're pretty much through with comments, so I'll just answer those, and then if more questions come up we'll answer that.

The way the premises system is being designed, as I said, it is a location-based thing. But the thought process, in answering some of your questions, is, what would we need to do if there were a disease outbreak and where would we need to go? So in cases like Deseret or some of these other large operations that have lots of pastures all over the place, if you're taking heifers and bringing them into a heifer pasture or whatever and then putting them out all over the whole ranch, if there were a disease outbreak that affected that herd, essentially that herd would be one herd, because you've got animals mixing and matching all over the place. So they would be potentially exposing and carrying the disease all over the place.

So if you have a situation like that, you could just use one premises number, because we'd need to go to all those locations. And what we would do is have one premises number and in the system just say, "There are pastures here, here, here, here, and here." So we would know if there were a disease outbreak that we would need to go to all of these places.



So, Charles, in answer to your question, if you had three pastures, you would basically, in most cases--and the bottom-line decision is based--if there are unusual situations, on what works with how you manage your cattle if it's not a normal situation, then you can talk to your state veterinarian and decide among yourselves, "What's the best way to assign premises numbers?" There is that flexibility built in because the systems are so different. Animal production is so different across the country that we didn't want to have it so rigid that it wouldn't work in one part of the country or another.

So, in your case, if you have three pastures, what you might want to do is just have one number, and you don't need to record when those animals moved from premises to premises, from pasture to pasture, because we would need to come back, if there were a disease outbreak, to all three pastures, because you would essentially have exposed animals in three locations.

So we wanted to make it so that it would allow us to get back to where we needed to go, but as simple as possible. I mean, realistically, people are not gonna record when they move a cow from one pasture to another. It's just not gonna happen. So I want to have it so that it makes sense as far as managing the cattle. So, no, you wouldn't need three numbers. You just need one number. And those animals, when they left one of those three pastures, would need to be identified. When they go off of your premises, they need to be identified.

On the other hand, a time that you might not want to do it that way--and there is flexibility for you as a producer to decide which way works best for you. If you have a commercial herd, for example, and a purebred herd, for example, that don't commingle, that are managed differently, that have different record systems, you might want to have two numbers or however many numbers. You've got a purebred herd over here, and you've got your commercial herd over here, and animals aren't gonna go back and forth between your commercial herd and your purebred herd in most cases. So if there was a disease traced back to, say, the purebred herd or the commercial herd, we would just need to deal with those animals, because they haven't exposed the other group.

So it depends on how you manage your animals and how separated they are, whether you might want to do one or two.

(Additional comments were made by Mr. Hawks and Dr. Ragan, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.)